

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Western Washington Office
510 Desmond Dr., SE
Suite 102
Lacey, WA 98503-1263

News Release



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Contact: Craig Hansen, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (360) 753-6046
Steve Keller, National Marine Fisheries Service, (360) 534-9309

Federal Agencies Schedule Meetings related to Forest Practices and Endangered Species Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (Services) have scheduled meetings in Ellensburg, Spokane, Tacoma, and Port Angeles to encourage public comment on the development of a National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Impact Statement (NEPA EIS) for Federal actions under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) related to the Washington State Forest Practices Rules. The March meetings are part of a 30-day scoping period to explain the NEPA EIS process and to invite comments and suggestions to ensure the full range of alternatives related to the anticipated request are identified. The comment period is expected to begin around March 14, 2003 and close 30 days later.

The EIS will be part of the review process involving an expected request by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for a limit on take prohibitions and/or incidental take authorization under the ESA. If the Services approve the expected proposal, some forest practice activities affecting aquatic species on non-federal forestlands would be exempted from certain ESA-related take prohibitions. The ESA defines take as meaning to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in such conduct. It also includes prohibitions against significant habitat modification or degradation which result in the death or injury of a protected species by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding, sheltering, spawning, or migrating.

Under the ESA, non-federal entities may submit a plan and request ESA coverage to take Federally protected species while conducting otherwise lawful activities. In exchange, the applicant agrees to protect elements of healthy ecosystems important to species covered in the plan. In this case that would include protection of areas important to salmon, bull trout, amphibians, and other aquatic species. New State Forest Practices Rules adopted in 2001 were based on the Forests and Fish Report prepared collaboratively by representatives from private industry, public interest groups, state and Federal agencies, and tribes.

The meetings will be held from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. and will begin with a one-hour open house for informal discussion and questions, followed by a presentation at 6:00 p.m.

Meeting dates and locations are:

March 18, 2003	Tacoma Sheraton Hotel, 1320 Broadway Plaza, Tacoma, Washington
March 20, 2003	Red Lion Hotel, 221 North Lincoln, Port Angeles, Washington
March 25, 2003	Red Lion at the Park, 303 West North River Drive, Spokane, Washington
March 26, 2003	Central Washington U., Grupe Center, 400 East 8 th Avenue, Ellensburg, Washington.

Anyone interested in commenting on the scope of the EIS is not required to attend the public meetings but may find the format helpful in developing their comments. Comments should be as specific as possible and can be mailed or faxed at any time during the comment period to:

Craig Hansen, FWS
510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 102
Lacey, WA 98503-1273
Telephone (360)753-6046
Fax (360)753-9518

Steve Keller, NMFS
510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 103
Lacey, WA 98503-1273
Telephone (360)534-9309
Fax (360)753-9517

Please note that, to ensure accuracy, the Services cannot accept comments by e-

mail.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is the principal steward of the nation's living marine resources. It protects marine and anadromous species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Marine Mammal Protection Act. An Agency of the Commerce Department, NOAA Fisheries also regulates the nation's commercial and recreational fisheries. It manages species under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Act (MSFCA) throughout federal waters, which extend 200 miles from the coastline. NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Region (NWR), administers programs off the coast of Oregon and Washington, and in the vast inland watershed habitats of Pacific salmon and steelhead in those two states and Idaho. The region's principal responsibility is implementing the Endangered Species Act for 25 populations of listed salmonids, covering more than 40 percent of the land base of three states. It also manages the West Coast groundfish fishery, a complex comprising more than 80 species.

The Washington Habitat Branch (WHB) of the NOAA Fisheries NWR Habitat Conservation Division based in Lacey, Washington has the responsibility of managing NOAA Fisheries authorities on most habitat related activities within the boundaries of Washington state, including marine and freshwater habitats. The Branch office conducts conservation planning, recovery planning and consultations with Federal agencies under the ESA and MSFCA primarily regarding anadromous salmonids. There are two field offices of the WHB, one located in Ellensburg, WA and the other within the NWR Seattle office at Sand Point.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

The Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office of the FWS is based in Lacey, Washington and addresses Federal fish and wildlife issues from the crest of the Cascades to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Canadian border to the Columbia River. The Office is responsible for the listing, recovery and consultation on species protected under the Endangered Species Act; the development of Conservation Plans;

implementation of the FWS portion of the Northwest Forest Plan within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl in Washington; issues involving migratory birds and other species protected by Federal laws; environmental contaminants assessment and spill response; fish and wildlife habitat restoration; review of proposed Federal projects, including Clean Water Act activities, and technical assistance on fishery resource issues. The Western Washington Fish and Wildlife Office is the lead FWS point of contact for issues with Statewide implications.

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